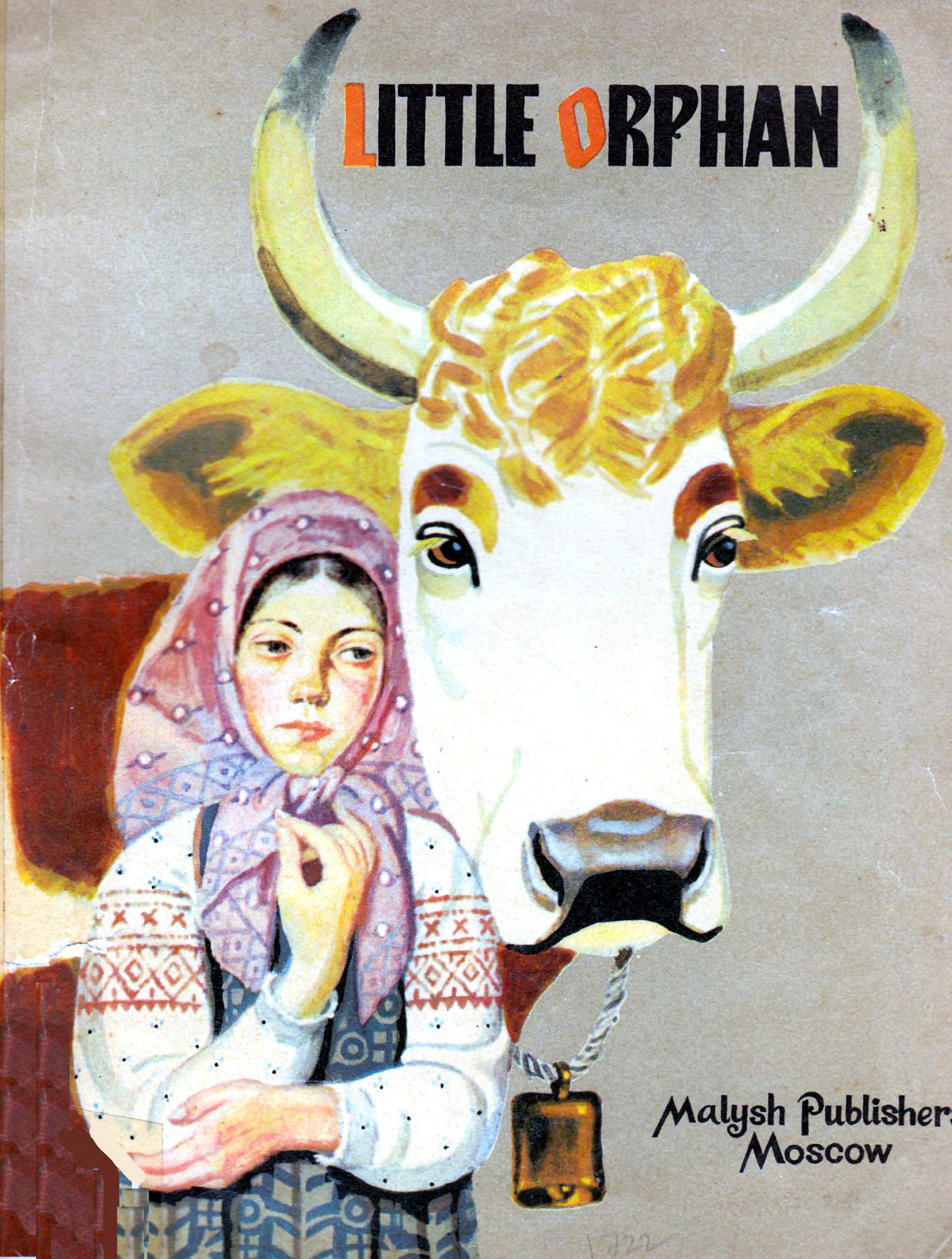


LITTLE ORPHAN



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There are good people in this world,

and some who are not so good, and others who have no shame at all. This was the kind of family that Little Orphan came to live with. When her parents died these people took her in, waited till she had grown some, and then nearly killed her with work. She spun and wove, and did all the housework.

Her mistress had three daughters. The eldest was called One-Eye, the middle daughter was called Two-Eyes, and the youngest was called Three-Eyes.

All day long the three sisters sat by the gate and watched the street, while Little Orphan slaved for them. She made their clothes, she spun and wove for them and never heard a kind word in return.

Little Orphan would go to the field, put her arms around her spotted cow, lay her head against the cow's neck and share all her troubles with her.

"My gentle cow, they beat me, scold me, begrudge me every piece of bread and say I mustn't weep. I'm to spin a pile of flax by tomorrow, weave it, bleach it and roll it into bolts."



The gentle cow replied,

“Pretty child, climb into my left ear and out the right, and all will be done.”

And so it was. Little Orphan would climb into the cow’s left ear and out the right, and lo and behold: the flax would be woven and bleached, and rolled into bolts.

She would take the cloth to her mistress. The old woman would inspect it, grunt, lock it away in a chest and then give Little Orphan still more work to do.

So Little Orphan would go to her gentle cow again, put her arms around her neck, stroke it, climb into its left ear and out the right and take the cloth to her mistress.

One day her mistress called to her daughter One-Eye and said,

“My darling daughter, my pretty girl, go see who’s helping the orphan. Who is it that spins and weaves, and rolls the cloth into bolts?”

One-Eye went along to the woods and then to the field with Little Orphan, but she forgot all about her errand. She became drowsy from the sun and lay down in the grass. Then Little Orphan crooned,

“Sleep, little eye, sleep!”

One-Eye’s eye went to sleep. While One-Eye slept, the gentle cow wove, bleached and rolled the cloth into bolts.

So the old woman learned nothing. She called to her second daughter, Two-Eyes, and said,

“My darling daughter, my pretty girl, go see who’s helping the orphan.”

Two-Eyes went along with Little Orphan, but she forgot all about her errand. She became drowsy from the sun and lay down in the grass. Little Orphan crooned,

“Sleep, one little eye! Sleep, another little eye!”

Two-Eyes closed her eyes. The gentle cow wove, bleached and rolled the cloth into bolts, while Two-Eyes slept on.

The old woman became very angry. On the third day she sent her third daughter, Three-Eyes, to find out and gave the orphan still more work to do.





Three-Eyes hopped and skipped. She became weary from the sun and fell into the grass.

Little Orphan hummed,

“Sleep, one little eye! Sleep, another little eye!”

But she forgot about the third eye.

And so two of her eyes fell asleep, but the third one stayed open and saw Little Orphan climb into the cow's left ear, out the right and pick up the bolts of cloth.

When Three-Eyes got home she told her mother what she had seen.

The old woman was very pleased. The very next day she said to her husband,

“Slaughter the spotted cow.”

The old man tried to talk her out of it.

“You must be mad, old woman. It's a healthy young cow!”

“I said slaughter it!”

There was nothing he could do, so he began honing his knife. Little Orphan discovered what he was up to, ran off to the field, put her arms around the spotted cow and said,

“Gentle cow, they want to slaughter you!”

The gentle cow replied,

“Don't eat my meat, my pretty child, but gather my bones, tie them up in a bundle, bury them in the garden and never forget me. Be sure to water my bones every morning.”

The old man slaughtered the cow.

Little Orphan did as the gentle cow had bid her. Though she was very hungry, she did not eat a morsel of the meat, but buried the bones in the garden and watered them every day.

Ah, what a fine apple tree sprouted from them! Its apples were large and juicy, its rustling leaves were of gold, and its springy branches were of silver. Everyone who passed stopped to marvel, everyone who came close gazed at it in wonder.

One fine day One-Eye, Two-Eyes and Three-Eyes were out walking in the garden. It so happened that a young nobleman was riding by just then. He was strong and rich, and handsome. When he saw the lovely apples he addressed the sisters thus,



“Pretty maids, whoever offers me an apple will be my wife.”

The three sisters scrambled to be the first.

The apples had hung low on the branches and had been within reach, but they suddenly rose high into the air.

The sisters tried to knock them down, but the leaves fell into their eyes. They tried to pick them, but the branches got tangled in their hair. Again and again they jumped, scratching their hands and arms, but all in vain.

Then Little Orphan went up to the tree. The branches bent down low, the apples reached out to her. She treated the handsome young man to one and he married her.

The young couple lived happily ever after, and Little Orphan never knew want again.







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A Russian Folk Tale as retold by Alexei Tolstoi
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